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THE WHITE HOUSE

April 3, 1961

44-4885

NSC REFERRAL NOT REQUIRERD

Dear Allen:

I think I owe you a note of regret for the nature of my intervention the other day. Obviously I should have expressed my reservations to you, which would be my normal habit, and it is only a partial excuse that the President was reacting with typical vigor to a breakfast conversation. Disagreement is a source of wisdom if combined with first hand candor and becomes a cause of friction if not.

Might I at the same time urge a policy point? I am gravely concerned that we balance the gain from specific operations of this sort against any more general political discredit or disadvantage that is either inherent or the result of any possible miscarriage or miscalculation. In the context of Laos, where indeed the Russians might plausibly be in process of persuading the Asians this seemed to me the missing element. And I was struck by Dick Bissell's typically candid comment that the gains were, indeed, marginal.

Our present advantage in the uncommitted world is the confidence that exists in our stability, responsibility and non-belligerent stance -- this is the greatest of the Kennedy assets. I am sure we agree on the urgency of safeguarding this asset.

Sincerely,

/s/

John Kenneth Galbraith

The Honorable Allen W. Dulles
Director, Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D. C.

cc: Mr. Bundy